

2012 John Adams and John Quincy Adams Pro Bono Publico Awards

Dorothy Varon

Dorothy Varon not only exemplifies the pro bono spirit through her individual work as an in-house lawyer at MassMutual, she has nurtured a culture of pro bono commitment throughout Western Massachusetts. It is not an overstatement to say that Dorothy Varon has been a one-woman catalyst for change.

While an attorney at the Springfield firm of Robinson Donovan, she helped create a pro bono program in conjunction with the Women's Bar Association offering legal services to income-eligible landlords and tenants about seven years ago. That program, the Hampden County Housing Court's lawyer-for-a-day program, provides eligible participants with counsel for eviction day proceedings. She has since been a tireless advocate for - and pro bono participant in - this program. Recently, for example, Attorney Varon co-organized a "100 Lawyer Challenge" which has significantly increased the number of pro bono

attorneys in Housing Court. In addition to her role as a recruiter for the program, she organizes trainings for volunteers and plans recognition events to encourage retention. Just last year, the program provided emergency assistance to those affected by the June 2011 tornadoes.

When Attorney Varon left the firm in 2006 to move in-house to Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, her enthusiasm for pro bono did not wane. With the backing of her General Counsel Mark Roellig, she started a multi-faceted pro bono program at Mass Mutual which she now oversees. As part of their overall program, the attorneys at Mass Mutual are now one of the most significant contributors to the lawyer-for-a-day program in Housing Court, and participate in the Hampden County Bar Association's Legal Clinic in Springfield District Court. Indeed, the pro bono program at Mass Mutual has become a model in Massachusetts for other corporate counsel wishing to start similar programs.

Attorney Varon not only shares her extraordinary enthusiasm for pro bono with her colleagues at Mass Mutual, but also with the next generation of lawyers at her alma mater, Western New England University School of Law. There, she lectures students about the importance of engaging in pro bono work throughout one's career.

Attorney Varon is nothing less than inspirational. Judge Fein of the Western Division Housing Court offered these words: "Attorney Varon is truly a force to be reckoned with - where others see obstacles, she sees obstacles to be overcome, and she is unwavering and resolute in her view that we have a professional and moral responsibility to incorporate pro bono work into our identities and self-images as lawyers. In the Housing Court and the District Court, the impact of Dorothy's commitment is felt daily, in the form of more lawyers volunteering to assist those most in need of legal advice and advocacy."

Attorney Varon's pro bono clients, and indeed, the legal community, are far better for her extraordinary efforts, and we extend our sincere appreciation and heartfelt thanks for her service.